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## **Abstract**

Research into aspects of documentary and portrait photography. The work explores issues in and around new documentary photography and portraiture. A study taking the form of two core units of theory and four units of studio practice, plus an exhibition of photographs exhibited at the Canberra School of Art Gallery from August 6th to 13th, 1998 which comprises the outcome of the last two units of the Studio Practice component, together with the Report which documents the nature of the course of study undertaken.



## Table of Contents

page

3	Acknowledgments
5	Introduction
7	Post Graduate Diploma
7	Australian Families Today
9	Childhood Series
7	Site Unseen
7	Master of Arts (Visual Arts) in Coursework
11	Memorta
11	Core Theoretical Unit: Arguing Objects
13	Rooms
18	Photographic Portraits
21	Core Theoretical Unit: Points of View
21	Conclusion
22	Addenda
23	Approved Study Programs
27	Curriculum Vitae
29	Bibliography

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## List of Photographs

- 1 Doan Minh And Tang Thi Tru.
- 2 Doan Minh Hoang and Nga Doan and their children.
- 3 Memorta, untitled.
- 4 Memorta, untitled.
- 5 Room, untitled.
- 6 Room, untitled.
- 7 Room, untitled.
- 8 Room, untitled.
- 9 The Parent Wedding Photograph, Swampscott, MA, 1985, Nan Goldin.<sup>1</sup>
- 10 Portrait, untitled.
- 11 Portrait, untitled.

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<sup>1</sup>Nan Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, Exhibition Catalogue, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1996, p 212.

## Introduction

Narrative and documentary usually seemed a partial truth to me. People always use one thing to say another<sup>2</sup>.

Rather than being a statement of disapproval, as photographer Graham Hare intended it, this statement lies at the heart of my interest in documentary and narrative photography. My fascination lies with the capacity of the camera, with documentary and narrative, in particular, to be a story telling medium. Photographs tell stories. The obvious trajectory from this is the assertion that the camera never lies and is connected to the real. For me this assertion and then the obvious ambiguity of photographic images underpins my interest in the medium and has formed the basis of both the theoretical and practical component of study towards my Master of Art in Visual Communication.

I completed a Graduate Diploma in 1995 that I rolled over into a Master of Arts (Visual Arts) by Coursework to be completed in August 1998. This report will outline my five semesters of study with particular emphasis on the last three semesters. A report, outlining the study towards my Post Graduate Diploma, is available in the Canberra Institute of the Arts Library.

My practical and theoretical work has been broken up in the following way over five semesters of study:

<b>Semesters 1 and 2 1994:</b>	<b>6 units of Studio Practice</b>
<b>Semester 1, 1997:</b>	<b>2 units of Studio Practice, core unit of Theory</b>
<b>Semester 2, 1997:</b>	<b>core unit of Theory</b>
<b>Semester 3, 1998:</b>	<b>2 units of Studio Practice</b>

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<sup>2</sup>Graham Hare, Artists Statement, Photography is Dead, Long Live Photography, Exhibition Catalogue, MCA, 1996.

**Photograph 1**  
**Photograph 2**

**Doan Minh and Tang Thi Thu.**  
**Doan Minh Hoang and Nga Doan and their children.**



Doan Minh Tru and Tang Thi Tru. They were sponsored to come to Australia from Vietnam in 1978. Last year the last of their nine children moved to Australia





Doan Minh Hoang and Nga Doan with their children Thuc Doen and Hau Doen. The family have lived in Australia for 15 years. Minh Hoangs' three sisters, five brothers and parents all live in Australia.



## Post Graduate Diploma

### *Semester 1 and 2 1994*

During this year of study I completed two bodies of work towards a Post Graduate Diploma.

#### **Australian Families Today**

This work is a series of thirty four black and white photographs depicting the variety in Australian Families in 1994. The families were selected by me as representative of the large variety of families that exist in Australia today. I had just returned from spending three years in Japan and had become aware that, unlike Japan, in Australia, there was no uniformity in who or what constituted an Australian Family. My study set out to visually depict this variety.

To raise the work above mere voyeuristic consumption, each photograph was accompanied by text. The text identified the family by name and outlined some information about the family that wasn't obvious in the photograph. The text and the photograph worked together to produce a story of that family and together the photographs produced an album of Australian Families in the 1990's.

My interest in these portraits was not however, only on the level of a visual diary of Australian Families. I was interested in the content of the images. How did I choose to photograph each family and what photograph, from many, was put into the exhibition? In all of the photographs a process of selection was important. Firstly the families I selected to include in the study, then how they were photographed and where they were photographed.

Each family was photographed in their own domestic environment. For me, our domestic environment is a reflection of our personalities. But then the question arose: how do I select the environment to best represent that particular family? While this was done in consultation with each family I was always looking for something in particular. Something to make a story. With Maria Gallo and her daughter Alex I placed them in their loungeroom. I found it interesting that while this lounge room was in suburban Canberra it appears as a blend of the nationalities that make up the house: Italian, Chinese and Australian.

Similarly in the photograph of Doan Minh Tru and Tang Thi Tru, although they have lived in Australia for twenty years their dress and house is Vietnamese. I was careful to use an angle to portray this. *photograph 1*. Yet in their sons' home, Doan Minh Hoang, while still essentially a Vietnamese household, there is little trace of Vietnamese culture. In fact, the wall was adorned with the ultimate iconic picture of western culture, the Swiss mountain scene. I carefully selected the painting and the exercise bike into the frame. *photograph 2*.

The way people placed themselves in the frame was also of interest. While I left this placement up to the families this provided another insight into each family. Phillip Nott and his wife Jeanne sit very close to their son Jake, almost as if they are protecting him. While Penny and Archie Vanderglas sit at each end of their children. Penny looks off into the distance, almost as if she is taking herself out of the picture. In fact, when she saw the photograph she said it revealed more than she thought possible. She separated from her husband later the same year.

Much has been written about whether it is possible to actually capture reality in a photograph. The Sydney photographer William Yang, seems to be answering Penny Vanderglas, when he says of some similar portrait work he did: 'They are not candid photographs. The people are all conscious of the camera, yet they are themselves as if they are posing at being natural'.<sup>3</sup> While other writers have dismissed or questioned the power of the camera to be anything to do with a replication of the real. Paul Carter states simply that: 'The visual rhetoric of the photographic is so persuasive, it is widely mistaken for a representation of our reality'.<sup>4</sup> While the British photographer Jo Spence describes the family album simply as a complete construction, a battle to maintain false images.<sup>5</sup> As a photographic artist it is this possibility of another story or angle on reality that continues my fascination with the camera. I am not interested in the real, probably because I know the camera has never been capable of reproducing the real. The camera is however, capable of producing an interpretation of the real. In all the family photographs my selection process was always conscious of presenting more than one story to the viewer. The photograph was only successful, for me, if it lay open more than one interpretation. For me it is the ambiguity, inherent in photography, that makes these images fascinating.

This is particularly with the framing and selection of the images. The strength of these images lies in the multiple stories being told simultaneously. While I can freely admit this now at the time I was reluctant to disclose this, feeling I was somehow betraying the people who I photographed. Now I acknowledge this as an essential part of the photographic process and have actively used framing and selection in the Rooms series to enhance the story telling in the images.

In writing this nearly three years after completing this work, it is interesting, for me, to reflect on these working methods. Rereading my Graduate Diploma Report, I realise I am now clearer, with hindsight, about my intentions with that project than I was at the time due to distance from the work and the resurfacing and continuation of similar ideas in the work for my Masters degree.

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<sup>3</sup>William Yang, "I ask Myself, am I Chinese?" Art and the Pacific, Vol. 1, p 89. 1994.

<sup>4</sup>Paul Carter, "The Only True Picture. Auto biography and Photography", Photofile, No xxxi, p 40.

<sup>5</sup>Jo Spence, Putting Myself in the Picture, Camden Press, London, 1986, p 98.

## Childhood Series

For my Post Graduate Diploma I also completed a series on children. Inspired by the work of artists like Sally Mann and Nan Goldin, I was investigating another side to childhood. In photography children are almost always represented as sweet and innocent, almost without personality. I wanted to present another side.

In these photographs I posed children in different situations, creating fictional stories of childhood. Each photograph had a portrait of a child as a central image. The child was presented in a situation that individually created a narrative. Again, similar to the family photographs I was playing with the ambiguity of the portrait. As Graham Clarke states in his book The Photograph: 'at virtually every level, and within every context the portrait photograph is fraught with ambiguity.'<sup>6</sup> I wanted to use this ambiguity to create photographs that were multidimensional stories.

## Site Unseen

Interest in documentary and narrative stayed with me and between finishing my Graduate Diploma and commencing my Master of Visual Arts Degree I did a teaching residency at the Northern Territory University. During this residency I completed another exhibition Site Unseen which consisted of photographs and text.<sup>7</sup> This was a story about Wadeye, an Aboriginal Community in the Northern Territory. The exhibition tells a number of stories using photography and language. The story that the press had created was presented in one room. Then the story of individual people was presented in portraits of individual people accompanied by text that gave each person their own voice. Together these portraits and stories told the story of a community. Ultimately the message from the exhibition was open to the viewers' interpretation.

## Semester 1,1997.

### Master of Art (Visual Arts) in Coursework

In my Masters Degree I wanted to further investigate the capacity of photography, in documentary and narrative, as a vehicle for storytelling. I also wanted to research the work of other photographers using documentary photography, in particular new forms of documentary. Amongst other things I was interested that documentary has been almost sidelined in Australia and renamed photojournalism, while in other countries

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<sup>6</sup>Graham Clarke, The Photograph, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, p101.

<sup>7</sup>Site Unseen, Northern Territory University Gallery, NT, November, 1996. Strathnairn Gallery, Holt, ACT, April, 1998.

**Photograph 3**    **Memorta, untitled.**  
**Photograph 4**    **Memorta, untitled.**









including America and England documentary has a strong foothold as a legitimate form of art photography.

## Memorata

This work was completed in semester 1, 1997. Using found images, old family video films and jewelry I was investigating through installation how this disparate group of objects would be perceived if arranged together as a coherent whole. I continued with the same ideas of storytelling that I had investigated in my post graduate work. I was also investigating installation and other ways of arranging photographic work. I was also interested in the looking at photographs and jewelry as the holders of memories

The installation combined photographs found at the dump, a video, that my father in law had discarded from the fifties because it was double exposed, and jewelry. Although this work was only on exhibition for my review, a passing staff member said how much she enjoyed my old family images. She was surprised when I said it was all found. photograph 3. Photographs of the past link us all to a common heritage. In any particular culture, photographs of the past bind people together through common treads.

This work had kept to my interests in documentary and narrative, but moved in other directions. There was no text and no people being photographed. I used photographs that contained narrative within each image. The work was installed as an installation using video, photographs and jewelry. photograph 4.

Although I was not entirely happy with the installation, due I feel, with hindsight, to my inexperience in working with installation, I wanted to continue working with these ideas particularly with using documentary as a starting point for narrative. I also wanted to investigate new ways of working with documentary photography. I continued to be fascinated with the multidimensionality of the photographic medium and its story telling capabilities, yet the way it remains so powerful as a supposed recorder of social space.

## Core Theoretical Unit: Arguing Objects

For the theoretical unit this semester I continued in the same areas of research. In a paper entitled, Sebastiao Salgado, Not Even Your Social Documentary Photographer, I investigated Sebastiao Salgado's work and working methods. How, as a social documentary photographer had he been able to bring so much attention to his work? What was it in his pictures of suffering people that allowed people to put these images on their walls? I turned to Roland Barthes with his explanation of semiotics. Salgado uses signs in the way he composes his images, signs that have universal meanings. A hand on the side of the image, larger than anything else in the image signifies a helping hand. Men, although with heavy sacks on their backs are always going upwards towards the light. The workers, although in reality suffering terrible hardship are always presented in



**Photograph 5**  
**Photograph 6**

**Room, Untitled**  
**Room, Untitled**







close up as god like, biblical figures. I presented an argument that due to semiotics and his Marxist ideology, Salgado has been able to present images to the public, that although essentially recording horrific scenes, are read as beautiful and are actually purchased by people as art.

## **Semester 1, 1998**

### **Rooms**

In my practical work I decided to stop working with installation, due to time restraints and priorities, but keep with the ideas of documentary and story telling. I returned to ideas from the series on Australian Families. Here I had photographed people in their own environment. Now I wanted the stories without the people. When photographing Australian Families and also another series of portraits of Gundaroo residents, (the small village outside Canberra where I have lived since 1989), people would often ask me what the interior of someone's house was like. Our domestic spaces offer insights into our personalities. Our homes are also private spaces, shielded from the world by walls. We allow our friends into our homes but often even then, only into the areas we want them to see. The bedroom door, for example, is often kept shut. Our homes also reflect our culture. They identify us not only as individuals but as belonging to a particular place and time in society. photograph 5 and 6.

### **Work and Working Methods**

This work consists of seventeen colour photographs of domestic spaces. The rooms I have chosen are from old Australian homes. In fact, they are homes in the small community where I live. They are homes that have been inhabited for a long time by the same owners. I deliberately picked the only five homes in the village that have had the same inhabitants for a long time. Time has marked the homes with the presence of their inhabitants.

Similar to the series on Australian Families these photographs have been made through a strict process of selection and framing. Photography, through its framing device is able to select certain areas to focus attention. In all these images I have intentionally framed the images in particular ways to give a feeling of unease. I have also framed them to capture the trace of human presence. The photographs also have an intended feeling of being private spaces, spaces you wouldn't necessarily recognise. You enter these spaces through the artifice of the camera.

My selection process is basically intuitive and done through trial and error. I printed the images that contained the qualities I wanted to capture: that is images that move between reality and theatre. In some cases I went back to the scene three times to rephotograph an image.

I also sought to preserve the feeling of authenticity in the images. I used the natural light of the rooms and left each space totally as I found it. In true documentary

style, I used a medium format camera to capture in detail the contents of each room. Yet because of the use of only natural light it is difficult to see everything, just as if you were looking into the actual rooms that often have dim lighting.

In making a set of these images I have purposely linked them in certain ways. In all the images there are either open doors or windows. I wanted to create a sense of continuity, as in a house. By sometimes allowing one room to be seen from another I have also worked against the notion that these are photographs of film sets.

Similar to the series Australian Families Today this work is about the ordinary things in life. I have always been interested in capturing the ordinary and by doing this making it less ordinary, even extraordinary. In the family photographs I captured ordinary people, here instead, I am using old rooms. These are all things that could easily be ignored. I am using the camera to reorganise things that can be easily overlooked but that become interesting through the lens of the camera.

## **Relevant Concepts and Contexts informing the work**

Val Williams states in her article The World of Interiors:

suddenly the home has become a fertile territory for photographers, curators, publishers and film-makers.<sup>8</sup>

Yet this is only a recent phenomenon. Even in Edward Steichen's panoramic exhibition and book The Family of Man, in 1955, fewer than one in ten of the photographs unmistakably were made in the home<sup>9</sup>. Most photographers were busy outside the home. But slowly in the 1980's in particular, photographers moved back into domestic spaces. While different reasons have been put forward for this, including the simple suggestion from Peter Galassi, that photographers: 'recognized that the overlooked opportunity was also a rich one, full of uncharted mysteries'.<sup>10</sup> However I would pinpoint deeper reasons. The home has become increasingly important as a source for photographic imagery as traditional, domestic structures in society crumble. The photograph is being examined for explanation. Secondly as the world becomes increasingly saturated with imagery of the outside world, the home and people's private spaces provide relief from general reportage. By entering into private spaces we enter into new, unseen imagery.

Whatever the reason, the domestic environment has continued into the 1990's to provide a rich source of imagery. This has been not only in photography but also in films and television. The Internet is increasingly full of sites made in peoples homes and

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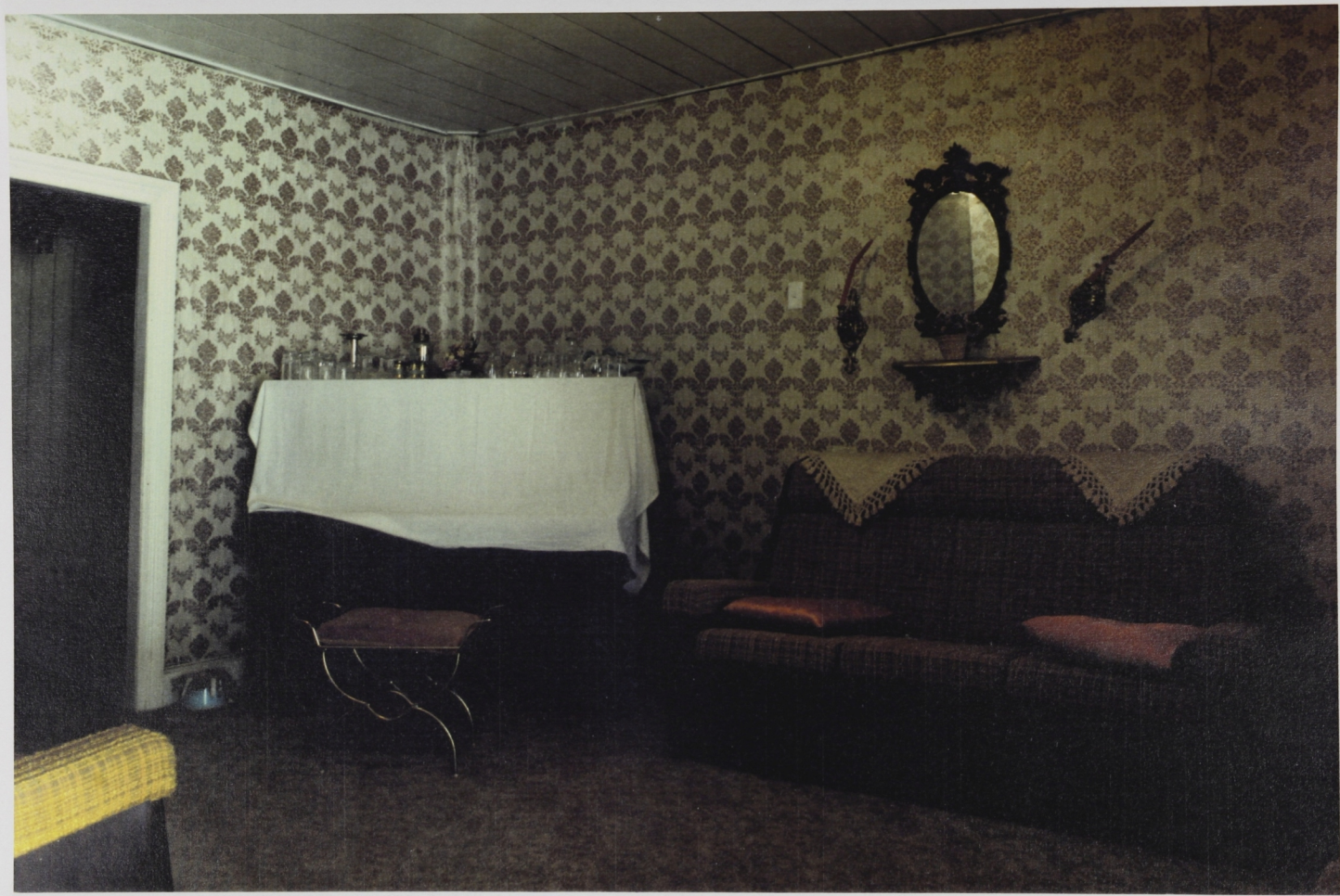
<sup>8</sup>Val Williams, The World of Interiors, in Creative CAmera, Feb/MArch, 1992, p 43.

<sup>9</sup>Steichen Edward, The Family of Man, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York, 1996.

<sup>10</sup>Peter Galassi, Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1991, p 13.

**Photograph 7    Room, Untitled**  
**Photograph 8    Room, Untitled**









workplaces.<sup>11</sup> There has been an opening up of the family album as a statement about society in general.

While this series of images doesn't contain people they are still about people. There are the obvious traces of human habitation in almost every image. In the bathroom are toiletries. In the kitchen ripening tomatoes, egg cartons and detergent and in the bedroom, bedlinen and clothes. The photographs contain plenty of evidence of what anthropologists call material culture - what people own, the stuff they hang on their walls and pile up in their kitchens. photograph 7 and 8. The spaces I have photographed are working environments and the objects that have accumulated in them are there through functional necessity. As a photographer, I take on the role of anthropologist unearthing and recording information about particular people's lives.

In addition these photographs document the rooms in Australian homes from a time, now past. A time when housing and housing conditions were usually more basic than they are today. With time marching on most of these kinds of rooms have now disappeared into the past. The actual rooms I have photographed will I am sure soon also disappear, as their inhabitants are old and the homes in need of repair. On this level these images are a documentary record of these old Australian rooms. On a more personal they actually document the homes of particular Gundaroo residents.

However, the work is about more than just a documentary record of old Australian homes. These rooms represent the past. They represent a common past to many Australians. Maybe they look like your grandparents' home or a place you went as a child. Maybe they represent the home of someone that has been passed down in family stories. In most cases the rooms have been relegated to memory. So the photographs are also about memory and nostalgia. For those who remember actually seeing homes like this in the past, the images bring back these images. For those who have only heard about what these homes used to look like they become the memory. Susan Sontag extends this with:

Photographs turn the past into an object of tender regard, scrambling moral distinctions and disarming historical judgments by the generalised pathos of looking at time past.....A photograph is only a fragment, and with the passage of time its moorings come unstuck. It drifts away into a soft abstract pastness, open to any kind of reading.<sup>12</sup>

Yet these photographs were taken in the present so they tend to take on a slightly unreal feeling, almost like a theatre set.

In all my work I am always conscious of the viewer. Just as in the work on Australian Families, where I wanted the viewer to relate not only to the photographs but

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<sup>11</sup>see for example <http://www.keyhole.cams.com/khc/man.htm> 25th July 1998.

<sup>12</sup>Susan Sontag, On Photography, Penguin, New York, 1977, p71.

**Photograph 9    The Wedding Photograph, Swampscott, MA, 1985, Nan Goldin.**





to implicate their own family stories into what they were seeing, in Rooms I hope the photographs will be catalysts for memories and nostalgia.

The work of many artists has influenced my work in documentary and in particular this series about rooms. All Nan Goldin's work has been influential. Goldin also notices the environment around her subjects and sometimes photographs images without people. Photograph 9. Another artist who has become increasingly important in the course of the study is Lynn Cohen. A Canadian artist, Cohen photographs scenes, that although completely genuine display elements of theatricality, similar in one way to my rooms. She says:

I was greatly amused by one critic recently who thought the work consisted of artificially constructed situations, a practice which would of course constitute a total contradiction to the essence of my work.<sup>13</sup>

This could equally be said about the series Rooms.

## Photographic Portraits

Throughout my post graduate studies I have attended a number of computer technology courses. As a photographic artist I am interested in these programmes and applications. I am also interested in the numerous body of commentary surrounding the widespread use of computers in the arts. This commentary has covered the extremes of statements that traditional photography is dead, to more subdued comments on the cutting of the association of the photograph to the real.

It is now possible to speak of the death of photography because this central indexical core, the ontological basis of the image, has become irrevocably softened. The transformation of an optical and chemical image into a data and pixalimage has finally prised apart the previously necessary lamination of the photograph to its anterior optical reality.<sup>14</sup>

Whatever, it is obvious that computer technology is here to stay and whether it is classified as another tool for artists or a new classification of art it is making a definite impact on the arts community. My series of portraits is a direct response to this impact. The series also continues with ideas presented in Childhood Series where the portrait is open to ambiguous interpretation.

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<sup>13</sup>Lynn Cohen, Lost and Found, International Cultural Relations, Limousin, 1994, p

<sup>14</sup>Martyn Jolly, Photography's Afterlife, in Photography is Dead! Long Live Photography!, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1996, p23.

**Photograph 10 Portrait Series**

**Photograph 11 Portrait Series**









## Work and Working Methods

My aim was to make a series of portraits that combined both photographic and computer technology. However, the longer I worked with the idea the more I realised that I could do everything I needed to do in the camera. These images have been composed in the camera although they could have equally have been composed in a computer. Similar to techniques used in the computer programme photoshop I have layered the images in the camera and used *fill in flash* to drop my subjects into place.

However, to further confuse the issue I have printed these as computer images. They are presented as Iris prints. So they have in fact been manipulated through scanning. By the very process of scanning images into a computer they are manipulated or changed from the original. To fit the image onto the computer screen the image have to be manipulated. They are both photographs and computer images.

## Relevant Concepts and Concerns Informing the Work

The first obvious concern in this work is portraiture. All the photographs are of people photographed in a particular environmental setting. The confrontational nature of each image links the series together. The photographs are also linked through their association to computer technology. Although actually composed in the camera each could easily have been generated through a computer. As such they are concerned with the issues around computer generated images and particularly the impact of the computer on the association to the real in photographic art. These images lie between real and composed. They talk about computer technology but are in fact slightly manipulated photographs. Photograph 10. Photograph 11.

As portraits my work has been strongly influenced by artists like Bettina Rheims and her series Modern Lovers, seen in the exhibition Discipline and Beauty at the New South Wales Art Gallery last year. However, as computer works the influences are much wider. The American computer artist Nancy Burson who morphed faces together is an obvious influence, along with computer artists working with identity including Keith Cottingham and his Fictitious Portraits and Anthony Aziz and Sammy Cucher and the Dystopia Series where the mouths and eyes of people were sealed, thus causing a loss of identity.

However, I am also influenced by artists who have taken the idea of computer technology and applied it to their own practice beyond photography. The American painter, Mark Kostabi recently seen on the cover of *Flash Art*, painting robotic, computer like images.<sup>15</sup> Most recently, Stephen Jones' Brain Project was shown at Art Space in

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<sup>15</sup>Flash Art, January/February, 1998.

Sydney.<sup>16</sup> Jones subverted the high technology of his computer interactive by casing the computer in a treadle sewing machine with a wheel to move the mouse.

## **Core Theoretical Unit: Points Of View**

In this second core unit, my major paper, again concerned with documentary photography was titled: A rise beyond realism in the new social documentary photography. In this paper I argued for the new documentary photography that has emerged in America and England. This is a practice that like my series Rooms uses the form and content of documentary as a point of departure for research, not as an end in itself. The new documentary rethinks documentary as a constructed language-recognizing photography as an agreed upon fiction, combining the aesthetic, the political and the social. The paper juxtaposed this position against the Leica Documentary Exhibition held in Melbourne. This exhibition was cited as Australia's first major attempt to open up discussion in Australia, yet simply grounded itself in the old issues of using documentary as a legitimate reason to photograph the *other*.

## **Conclusion**

Both the practical and theoretical components of study for my Master of Arts (Visual Arts) has facilitated study in issues surrounding documentary and portrait photography. This has resulted in two written papers, a new exhibition of work and will, I am sure influence my practical work in the future.

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<sup>16</sup>Stephen Jones, Brain Project, Art Space Gallery, Sydney, July 2nd-25th .

## Work Proposal

Semester 1, 1997

### **Addenda**

#### **Additional Proposals**

The original proposal presented ideas of work in the photographic and documentary traditions. The need for a documentary photography writer with national links for a long time, which I did a large body of work documenting American families. Last year I had an exhibition titled "The Family" in London, using the work in newspaper articles and participating in the national documentary exhibition. In my new work I am attempting to do possible work of photography has within the subject. The new idea proposed by Richard Smith.

#### **Methods and Resources**

I am working with a group of found photographs. Film and prints. I will be then together in an installation for the viewer.

Initially I see the outcome as being open-ended. Although I would present the subject would read the work and find meaning within the translation.

I want to push my working methods beyond photography. I want and need the experience of working with different methods.

#### **Context**

As James Farn is ongoing debate about the possible relevance and the changing nature of documentary photography. This work comes into the article. It also has family history as is related to the numerous bodies of work on found or existing or work with American families today.

Some of the artists I have and will consider for the work include:

Christina Rossetti

James Knorr who works with setting up flowers in the house

In Space: The Family Album

Thomas Smith, Lower Simpson

Chris Moe Wilson, photographs of her own family

Frank Smith by Martin Parr, William Yang, Jacky Rodger, Richard Lee

#### **Bibliography**

Ed Wilson, "What's Missing in the Family?"

Marjorie, "The Balladeer's Women: Representing"



## **Work Proposal**

**Semester 1, 1997**

### **Memorata**

#### **Aims of the Project**

The aims of my practical work this semester revolves around ideas of truth within photography, or more specifically the possible truth a photograph can tell. This is of interest to me because I have been a documentary photographer working with assumed truths. For my post graduate work I did a large body of work documenting Australian Families. Last year I had an exhibition titled Site Unseen, in Darwin, using the truth of newspaper articles and juxtaposing them against documentary information. In my new work I am assuming that the possible truth of an image lies within the viewer. This is an idea expressed by Roland Barthes.

#### **Methods and Resources**

I am working with a group of found photographs, film and jewelry. I will tie them together in an installation for the viewer.

Basically I see the outcomes as being open-ended although I would presume the viewer would read the work and find meaning within the installation.

I want to push my working methods beyond photography. I want and need the experience of working with different mediums.

#### **Context**

At present there is ongoing debate about the possible relevance, and the changing nature of documentary photography. This work enters into this debate. It also uses family imagery so is related to the numerous bodies of work on families including my own series Australian Families Today.

Some of the artists I have and will consider for the work include  
Christen Botanski,  
Karen Knorr who works with setting up fiction in the image  
Jo Spence. The Family Album  
Thomas Struth, Lorna Simpson  
Carrie Mae Weems, photographs of her own family  
Trinh Minh-ha, Martin Parr, William Yang, Jacky Redgate, Michael Lesy.

#### **Bibliography**

Val Williams, Whose Looking at the Family?  
Nan Goldin, The Ballad of Sexual Dependency





## **Work Proposal**

### **Semester 1, 1998.**

I intend to complete two bodies of work for my final assessment. The two bodies of work will combine together to count for two units of studio practice.

### **Aims of the project**

#### **Rooms**

When I completed my Post Graduate Diploma I photographed Australian Families in their homes. Both the image of the family and the interior of their home told the story of that particular family. People who knew I was visiting particular people would often ask me what a person's home was like. Our homes offer insight into our personalities.

My current body of work again returns to these ideas but this time the people themselves are missing from the image. I am photographing particular interiors, interiors from old Australian homes that have been inhabited by the same people for a long time. These images also reflect the inhabitants but time has turned the rooms into more than just rooms that reflect particular people's personalities. The rooms seem to have taken on a particular aesthetic. It is no longer just Matt Crow's bedroom. On the one hand, the photographs of the rooms become like theatre sets yet on the other hand they also document old Australian homes of the past, thus providing feelings of nostalgia and invoking memories.

The resulting images rely heavily on photography's ability to select and frame scenes within the rooms. Another aim in the work is to preserve a feeling of privacy, suggesting that unless a member of the public visits these rooms for a specific purpose their existence otherwise goes unnoticed. Similarly Lynn Cohen said of her work: 'they are closed spaces only entered through the artifice of the camera's eye'<sup>17</sup>.

The photographs are in colour using ambient light just as our eyes see them.

#### **Portraits**

Similar to the rooms series I also worked on a series of portraits for my Post Graduate Diploma. However, in this series of portraits I am working on colour portraits that look constructed and in doing so question the link to the real. In these I am not concerned with capturing particular people but with ideas of constructing images both in the camera and in the computer. Are these images real or have they been constructed? As yet I am unsure whether they will be manipulated in the computer or just in the camera.

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<sup>17</sup>Lynn Cohen, Lost and Found, International Cultural Relations, Canada.

## **Installation**

While neither of these bodies use overt installation, as some of my previous work has, I see them as almost putting the installation aspect in the image. This is particularly true in the rooms series. I also intend to frame the room series in ornate gold frames.

## **Working Methods and Resources.**

In both bodies of work I am building on skills that I have been developing since beginning my post graduate studies. I am using the colour machine and the computer skills I have developed in the last couple of years.

I am also drawing heavily on the theory units that I completed for the MA Course Work Programme. In both units I researched aspects of documentary photography for my research papers. It is some of these issues I am bringing to this work.

## **What is the wider Context for the Proposed Projects?**

For both projects I am drawing on much of the literature that has been written on documentary photography in recent years. More particularly I am interested in the new documentary photographic theory that uses documentary as a jumping off point to speak about something not simply speak for human situations. My work is influenced by the writings of people like Martha Rosler, Alan Sekula, Carrie Mae Weems and Karen Knorr.

## **Rooms**

In an article titled *The World of Interiors* it states: 'suddenly the home has become a fertile territory for photographers, curators, publishers and film-makers'.<sup>18</sup> The article goes on to list numerous recent bodies of work exploring the home. Some of these include Martin Parr's *June Street*, Bill Owen's classic book *Suburbia*, and Nick Waplington's book *Living Room*. Some of the other influences are Nan Goldin, the Canadian artist's Lynn Cohen's photographs of various interiors and more recently Annie Hogens untitled colour murals of bare interiors in the ACP exhibition *Disclosure* in December 1997 and Esko Manniko's photographs in the 1997 Sydney Biennial.

## **Portraits**

In this work I am concerned with the photograph being a replication of the real. While this has never necessarily been the case there has been more debate and discussion about this since the widespread use of computer manipulated images. My photographs are manipulated in the camera, while real they are also a fabrication. Some of the artists who have influenced me in this work are Betting Rheims's portraits shown in the *Beauty and Discipline* show at the New South Wales Art Gallery last year and the computer artist Nancy Burson.

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<sup>18</sup>Val Williams, *The World of Interiors*, in *Creative Camera*, Feb/March, 1992.

## **Catherine Laudenbach**

- 1988 Travelled in Europe.  
1989-1992 Lived and photographed in Japan.

### ***Education***

- 1998 Candidate, Master of Art. Canberra School of Art. Institute of the Arts. ANU.  
1995 Graduate Diploma of Art. Canberra School of Art. Institute of the Arts. ANU.  
1992 Associate Diploma of Art in Photography. Canberra Institute of Technology.  
1989 Certificate in TESOL. Australian Centre for Languages, Sydney.  
1980 Bachelor of Education. Canberra University.

### ***Group Exhibitions*** selected

- 1988 Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, A Sense of Place, Touring Exhibition.  
1998 Canberra Sister City Exhibition, Nara, Japan.  
1995 Post Graduate Exhibition, Canberra School Of Art Gallery.  
1995 McGregor Photography Exhibition, Toowoomba Queensland.  
1994 Souvenirs, Canberra Contemporary Art Space.  
1993 Scene at Night, Tilley's, Canberra.  
1993 Farewell Exhibition, Fujisawa, Japan.  
1992 Australian Vision, Morioka, Japan.  
1991 Agfa National Photographic Exhibition, Albury, NSW.  
1989 McGregor Photography Exhibition, Toowoomba, Queensland.  
1988 Triptych, Tilley's, Canberra.

### ***Solo Exhibitions***

- 1998 Site Unseen, Strathnairn Gallery, Holt. A.C.T.  
1996 Site Unseen, Northern Territory University Gallery, Darwin, NT.  
1996 Australian Families Today, Western Australian Photographers Gallery.  
1989 Still Faces in a Moving World, Photo Access, Canberra.

### ***Related Employment***

- 1998 Part time Lecturer, Canberra Institute of the Arts, Photomedia. continuing.  
1996 Visiting Lecturer, Northern Territory University, Photography Department.  
1995 Artist in Residence, Canberra Boys Grammar School, Canberra.  
1994 Part time teacher, Canberra Institute of Technology, Photography Department. continuing.  
1994-1998 Tutor, Canberra Institute of the Arts, ANU, Open Art.  
1988-1989 Photographer, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

### ***Grants***

- 1995 Canberra Cultural Council, Individual Artist's Grant.  
1996 NAVA grant to document work.

### ***Commissions***

- 1996 Liverpool Public Hospital

### ***Publications***

- 1998 An Exhibition, Art Review, The Canberra Times, April 14th, 1998.

- 1996 Site Unseen Catalogue, Northern Territory University.
- 1996 Women, Work and Stress Publication. ACT government.
- 1989 Canberra Times, Art Review, Brian Oakes.
- 1994 Canberra Times, Art Review, Sonia Barron.

### Collections

Australian National Library, Canberra.  
 Liverpool Community Hospital, Sydney.  
 Private collections in Australia and Japan.



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